UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (FOURTH COMMITTEE)
18th meeting
held on
Monday, 15 November 1993
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 18th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.4/48/SR.18
17 January 1994
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

93-82385 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.1(p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 85: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (A/48/13 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, A/48/275, 372-377, 431 and 554)

1. Mr. TÜRKMEN (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), introducing his annual report for the period 1992 to 1993 (A/48/13), said that the Agency was meeting with the Committee in a completely different political environment. The mutual recognition by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel and the signing of a Declaration of Principles which was guiding their negotiations on an interim self-government in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had already had a great impact on the role UNRWA must play in the long term and in the short term.

2. In the long term, one of the issues to be addressed, after the interim arrangement for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was in place, was the resolution of the refugee problem. Negotiations on that issue were to begin not later than two years after the start of the interim period. Until a final agreement was concluded, UNRWA would continue to function in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the situation would in principle be no different, since the refugee problem would not be politically resolved until a later stage. Nevertheless, the establishment of a Palestinian authority would put UNRWA in a radically different position, for it would continue its activities to the extent requested by the Palestinian authority, and in close coordination and consultation with it.

3. The PLO had indicated its desire to see UNRWA continue its programmes of assistance for Palestine refugees, including those in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and had asked the Agency to expand the programmes to promote social and economic development. UNRWA had been reflecting on its own role since the start of the peace negotiations in Madrid two years earlier, and thus, when the peace process had taken a big leap forward in September, it had had no difficulty in adapting and had been able to respond to the immediate need to promote social and economic development in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. One reason why UNRWA had been able to make that transition relatively smoothly was its large Palestinian staff of some 200,000, many of whom were in senior management positions in education, health and social services, and had remained in contact with their Palestinian counterparts to assist them in the preparation of plans and programmes. Another reason was that, over the years, UNRWA had been in charge of planning, preparing, implementing and administering its own projects and programmes, and it was now gathering the fruits of the rich experience its staff had accumulated.

4. Since the annual report covered a period pre-dating the signing of the Declaration of Principles, a preface had been added referring to the events that had taken place in September, because they would have such a great impact on the region and hence on UNRWA. The Declaration of Principles and the current negotiations were a turning-point in the history of the region. The entire United Nations system would be called upon to play a role, and the Secretary-General had already in September 1993 established a task force which

(Mr. Türkmen)

had produced a report entitled "Supporting the transition", which emphasized the importance of concentrating United Nations assistance to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on maintaining and upgrading public services and improving the basic infrastructure and related social services. In the context of the objectives defined in that report, UNRWA had developed short-term projects to improve the services and infrastructure in the area, and those activities could help sustain the momentum of the positive change set in motion by the signing of the Declaration of Principles.

5. A substantial response by the international community was necessary if the peace process was to be bolstered by social and economic development. The Conference to Support Middle East Peace, held in Washington on 1 October 1993, was a landmark in that it had mobilized resources to be channelled for relief and development and had symbolized the commitment of the international community.

6. In consultation with the Palestinian leaders, UNRWA had developed a peace implementation programme, under which it had identified nearly 100 short-term projects costing $100 million for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The projects, which could be implemented within six to nine months, aimed to improve services, physical infrastructure and social services and to create new employment opportunities for the 40 per cent of the workforce idle since the closure of the occupied territory. The activities included school repairs, the repair of centres for women's programmes and youth activities, and the repair and reconstruction of shelters in refugee camps. Health clinics would undergo maintenance, and projects would be started to address the extensive environmental health problems, especially in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA had begun to do a series of feasibility studies to plan the long-term development of the environmental health sector; and in the short term, it was proposing to improve solid waste disposal and water supply.

7. In the area of income generation, UNRWA had made plans to expand its programme of loans to Palestinian businesses, and hoped to help businesses requiring capital beyond the current $70,000-ceiling. In addition, training programmes for owners of small and medium-sized businesses would be expanded.

8. All the Agency's short-term projects shared certain characteristics: they could be implemented within a six- to nine-month period, they promoted economic and social advancement, they were in sectors in which UNRWA had long experience, they provided vital services to the Palestinian community, and they offered new job opportunities. The short-term projects were being carried out in addition to ongoing construction projects costing some $60 million.

9. The main task of UNRWA was to see its present and proposed projects through to completion. The Agency was pleased at the initial response of the donor community and at the confidence that the World Bank and donors had shown in its ability to plan and implement projects rapidly, effectively and economically. It was currently embarking on planning and project preparation for the second

(Mr. Türkmen)

year of the transition period, and it hoped that other agencies would also begin to implement substantial programmes in their areas of competence.

10. He pointed out that the Agency's programmes were carried out in cooperation with other organizations. Accordingly, its health programme, which had resources of $64 million for 1993, was coordinated with the World Health Organization (WHO). The Agency's senior health staff at headquarters were seconded from WHO which also supported its programme for human resources development in health. Similarly, its senior education staff at headquarters, who were responsible for managing 1993 education resources of over $151 million, were seconded from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). For many decades, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had underwritten the Agency's expanded programme of immunization with the supply of free vaccines. Since 1988, UNRWA and UNICEF had had a joint physiotherapy programme in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA had worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a number of environmental health matters and would expand its cooperation in that sector, especially in the West Bank. It was working with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in an expanded maternal health and family planning project in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

11. The impact of the Agency's ongoing programmes was long term. UNRWA was involved in the daily lives of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in many ways. For example, it was the largest employer after the Israeli civil service, as it employed 8,000 people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: all Palestinians and the majority themselves refugees. Its 1993 budget and expenditures in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip totalled over $135 million. Its spending on education, health and relief and social services in the occupied territory accounted for nearly half of total public expenditure: 68 per cent in the Gaza Strip and 31 per cent in the West Bank. The more than 1 million registered refugees represented 78 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip and 40 per cent of the population of the West Bank. UNRWA ran 253 schools which provided 56 per cent of all elementary and preparatory education in the Gaza Strip and 17 per cent in the West Bank. It also ran four vocational training centres; 52 clinics that treated 2 million patients per year, 40 women's programme centres and 19 youth activity centres. It provided 95 per cent of all direct relief assistance in the Gaza Strip and 75 per cent in the West Bank. It had introduced an income-generation and job-creation programme through which it had already disbursed $3 million. Because of its presence in the lives of Palestinians, the Agency had been able to respond immediately to new challenges posed by war and conflict and, now, peace.

12. He said that recent political events must be paralleled by rapid improvement in the conditions of Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA seemed to be one of the main international agencies through which substantial funds could be efficiently channelled in support of the peace process. However, while international attention was focused on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, overlooking the needs of the 1.7 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic could harm the peace

(Mr. Türkmen)

process. The Agency had therefore welcomed the donor response to its plea, particularly the pledge of $1.5 million announced by the United States Government for the construction of housing for displaced Palestinians in Lebanon.

13. With respect to the Agency's financial situation, earlier in the year it had anticipated a shortfall of $28.5 million which had been reduced by austerity measures to $4 million. However, unless contributions to the regular budget and emergency-related programmes increased, UNRWA would face a shortfall of $30 million in 1994 and $35 million in 1995. The Agency hoped that donors would contribute to its regular and special programmes, because they would be contributing to the peace process. It also hoped that the number of donors would increase.

14. In order to streamline its operations and make them more effective, the Agency was moving its programme departments from Vienna to Amman, Jordan. In connection with the resolution requesting the return of UNRWA headquarters to Beirut, contacts had been established with the Lebanese authorities with a view to a possible move.

15. He wished to reiterate that UNRWA was in constant contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Palestinian community leaders. It also maintained very good working relations with the Government of Israel, which had expressed a wish to see UNRWA continue and expand its operations. However, if a settlement was reached at the close of the interim period, there would no longer be a need for an organization established to assist the Palestinian refugees. The Agency was coming to the end of the task entrusted to it 40 years earlier, and its main concern would be to complete that task as successfully as possible.

16. Mr. SEIM (Norway), speaking in his capacity as Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), introduced its report (A/48/554). He said that, in accordance with its mandate, the Group had considered the information provided by the Comptroller of UNRWA on the Agency's financial situation and 1994 requirements and had formulated its concluding remarks, which were contained in section IV of the report.

17. The Working Group stressed that UNRWA had failed to receive funding sufficient enough to deliver all of its planned programmes in 1992 and that it expected the same situation to prevail in 1993. It also pointed to the difficulties which the Agency had experienced in maintaining the level of contributions required for the programme of extraordinary measures in Lebanon and the occupied territory (EMLOT) and remarked that the urgent needs emphasized in the Commissioner-General's two special appeals had not been fully addressed. It commended the Commissioner-General for his fund-raising efforts and shared his concern about funding prospects for 1994. Expenditure under the regular

(Mr. Seim, Norway)

programme was expected to increase by 5 per cent in order to meet the needs of a growing number of beneficiaries and to cover unavoidable increases in prices and staff costs. While the Working Group was confident that the Commissioner-General would continue improving administrative efficiency, contributions would have to increase in order to cover expected expenditure in 1993. The Working Group was particularly concerned at the level of funding for emergency-related programmes because their discontinuation or reduction could have disturbing humanitarian and political consequences.

18. The Group commended the Agency for its response to new and continuing humanitarian needs and for the measures it planned, particularly in the area of job-creation and income-generating projects. The Working Group urged all Governments to bear in mind the foregoing considerations when deciding upon the level of their contributions to UNRWA for 1994. In particular, it urged Governments that had not yet contributed to UNRWA to do so, and those that had to increase their contributions and consider contributing additional funds in support of emergency-related and special programmes.

19. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) said that about 45 years previously the existing 2.8 million Palestinian refugees, or their parents, had been uprooted from their country and forced to live in tents in the surrounding areas. Half the Palestinian people lived as refugees and one third of them were in refugee camps scattered throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and the neighbouring States.

20. From the start the international community had adopted a clear position, calling for an immediate and just solution for the Palestine refugees on the basis of the right of return or compensation, as defined in General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Unfortunately the General Assembly noted annually, with regret, that the resolution had not been complied with. In that connection he emphasized the inalienable and individual nature of the rights of Palestine refugees and the need to differentiate between those rights and the right of every single Palestinian to Palestinian nationality and citizenship.

21. Over those years, UNRWA had made great strides in dealing with the humanitarian aspects of the problem, specifically with regard to relief, health care and, most importantly, education.

22. On 13 September 1993 a momentous development towards the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East had taken place in Washington, when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel had signed a Declaration of Principles providing for interim self-government arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, beginning with an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area. The Declaration had also provided for negotiations on the final settlement, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), to include the issue of the refugees. The Declaration of Principles also took into account the situation of the displaced persons of 1967 and provided for the establishment of a continuing committee that would decide, inter alia, the modalities for the

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Observer, Palestine)

admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The international community should support such positive developments and at the same time reaffirm its position of principle with regard to the rights of the Palestine refugees in accordance with international legitimacy and continue to provide the necessary assistance until a final settlement materialized.

23. The signing of the Declaration of Principles had given a new impetus to the work of the multilateral groups derived from the Madrid peace process. At the latest meeting of the group dealing with the refugee problem a successful attempt had been made to accelerate family reunification and the importance of assisting all Palestine refugees had been emphasized.

24. The new situation created by the recent political developments required that additional efforts and certain adjustments should be made in the work that was being done. The United Nations should play a major role over the coming period of time, including the provision of assistance to the Palestinian people in their nation-building efforts. UNRWA should intensify its programmes of assistance. The PLO intended to broaden its discussions with UNRWA so as to coordinate future cooperation between the two sides. Serious consideration should also be given to moving certain parts of UNRWA, especially the operational departments, to Palestinian territory. That would help to reduce expenses while continuing to allow for the provision of quality assistance to the Palestinian people. The PLO commended the efforts of the Secretary-General to establish an advanced coordinating mechanism among the interested organizations and agencies of the United Nations system and hoped that it would be placed under his direct supervision.

25. After quoting from the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13), which referred to UNRWA's efforts to provide for the safety and security of the Palestinian population in the occupied territory, he expressed his appreciation of those efforts; they had helped to alleviate the consequences of the oppressive measures against civilians, including children, the destruction of homes, the use of undercover units and the closure of areas in the occupied territories, particularly Jerusalem. He also drew attention to the section of the report dealing with Israeli violations against UNRWA's staff, operations and installations. UNRWA and the international community should keep the situation under close scrutiny.

26. He also noted the grave deterioration in the socio-economic situation which basically resulted from Israeli occupation policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory. In the light of the new political circumstances, the PLO hoped that it would be able to join the Advisory Commission in order to contribute directly to its work; the PLO stood ready to work with all Member States that wanted to improve the traditional resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the agenda item under discussion, making them more responsive to the new situation, but without undermining fundamental positions of principle.

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Observer, Palestine)

27. On the day marking the fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by the Palestine National Council, which had been acknowledged by the General Assembly in its resolution 43/177, and in the light of recent political developments there were reasons for hope, including hope for the just solution of the problem of the Palestine refugees, and new opportunities that should be seized.

28. Mr. BATAINEH (Jordan) said that he had studied document A/48/13 and that the Government of Jordan welcomed the Commissioner-General's decision to continue the various UNRWA programmes, as well as UNRWA's achievement in providing the Palestinians with vital services efficiently in very difficult and complex circumstances. Jordan was aware that full use should be made of the profound knowledge and experience of Mr. Türkmen, whose name had become a symbol of UNRWA's greater administrative, financial and qualitative efficiency, as the Agency entered on the new and decisive stage of its work.

29. In 1993, for the first time, the subject of UNRWA was under consideration in the context of positive developments on the Palestine question, which would lead to a new era in the region and make it possible to increase the quantity and quality of UNRWA's activities. The recognition of each other by the Government of Israel and the PLO, the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the agreement between the Governments of Jordan and Israel on the issues which would serve as a basis for negotiations in the peace process had together brought about a general atmosphere of optimism and confidence over the progress in the peace process.

30. Jordan believed the cause of the Palestine refugees to be a sacred one; it understood their prolonged suffering and would continue its contribution to establishing reasonable negotiations within the framework of the peace process and in all international forums, setting aside everything that would not be relevant to the current situation. It was, however, clear that such an outcome would be achieved only if the Israeli occupation authorities began to act differently. There were encouraging signs in that direction and Jordan hoped that there would be more.

31. The Commissioner-General's report (A/48/13) reaffirmed the vital need to achieve an overall political settlement covering all aspects of the Palestine question, in particular by resolving the political and humane dimension of the Palestine refugee problem, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

32. His country's growing interest in the question of Palestine refugees was due partly to the fact that it had taken in the greatest number of refugees and had since 1948 been affected by the increasing burden on its infrastructure and finances. The international community had not allocated to UNRWA the funds it needed in order to deliver minimum services to Palestine refugees. Jordan had taken on the responsibility of providing direct services, costing 120 million Jordanian dinars a year, amounting to over half of UNRWA's budget, to attend to outstanding needs, despite its own difficult economic situation.

(Mr. Bataineh, Jordan)

Not providing the necessary funds to support UNRWA's work resulted in the deterioration of economic, social and health conditions for the Palestine people and led to increased desperation and extremism.

33. He emphasized his conviction that UNRWA's mandate would continue until the refugee problem was resolved within the framework of a just and peaceful settlement of all aspects of the Palestine question, along with measures to guarantee the rights of Palestine refugees in all territories under Israeli occupation since 1967 and a recognition of the inalienable right of all refugees to return to their former places of residence in those territories. It was also necessary to move UNRWA's headquarters to the region to facilitate implementation of its programme. In the light of recent developments, it might be appropriate for it to be in Gaza.

34. Mrs. FRIEDRICH (Austria) said that UNRWA had provided vital services in the fields of education, health, social services and relief to more than 2.8 million refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which were reflected in its report. She expressed regret about the incidents of mistreatment that threatened the safety of UNRWA staff in the region.

35. She noted with concern the deplorable socio-economic consequences that had followed the closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the serious deterioration of the political climate and security, and expressed the hope that the negotiations would help improve the situation. The Agency, which was already facing a difficult situation had, in addition, seen a decrease in the contributions that it received. In recent years, her Government, which was one of the major donors, had increased its annual contributions to the UNRWA budget and had provided assistance programmes to the Palestinians with the help of religious and private institutions and through the Austrian cooperation budget. In 1992, its contributions to Palestinian assistance programmes had come to US$ 2,751,000. She encouraged all States to provide UNRWA with the financial support it needed.

36. In a commendable effort to support peace talks regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, the Agency had presented both background information and specific project proposals for the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with the aim of improving the economic and social situation and creating the necessary institutional infrastructure. Her Government had welcomed the Israeli-Palestinian agreement, and hoped that it would live up to the expectations it had created and that it would contribute to a considerable improvement in living conditions of the Palestinian people.

37. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that with the exchange of letters of recognition and the signing in Washington of the Declaration of Principles between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, a new era had dawned in the areas served by the Agency. As His Holiness Pope John Paul II had noted on 12 September 1993, there was another special reason to offer a fervent prayer, since after a long period of

(Archbishop Martino, Observer, Holy See)

suffering, important signs of the desire for peace in the Holy Land and the Middle East were becoming evident.

38. His delegation applauded those first steps that would bring peace to the land which Jews, Christians and Muslims considered sacred, and agreed with Prime Minister Rabin who, in his statement, had called, in a loud and clear voice, for an end to all suffering and bloodshed. The Catholic Church, working through the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, which had been founded in 1949 by Pope Pius XII, had served to feed, house and educate victims of conflicts, as well as to care for those in need of medical assistance. Those programmes, sometimes in collaboration with UNRWA, had been supported by generous donors worldwide, including the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, Miserior, Missio, Kinderhilfen Bethlehem, Caritas Internationalis and the Archdioceses of Cologne and Osaka. Those donors, working with local churches, had sought to establish an adequate infrastructure to maintain stable family and community relationships.

39. In view of the long-standing history of the region, his delegation recognized the importance of supporting those first steps of the peace agreement. At the signing of the agreement, Chairman Arafat had noted that more courage would be needed to continue the course of building coexistence and peace between the two peoples. In fact, many difficult issues remained to be resolved, one of them being the status of Jerusalem. As Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran had noted, Jerusalem represented a good for humanity to be preserved in all its dimensions and characteristics. To that end, the Holy Sea requested that the city should be given special status with international guarantees.

40. In his message for World Day for peace, His Holiness Pope John Paul II had said that peace was much more than the simple absence of war and that it postulated a condition of authentic respect for the dignity and rights of every human being, a condition enabling him or her to achieve complete fulfilment. The Holy See would therefore continue its efforts to assist communities through the churches to address the needs of those still suffering, so that the seeds of peace might germinate.

41. Mrs. ZIDMUNDOVA (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, recalled that the Commissioner-General of UNRWA had said in his report that although the information it contained applied to the period covered by the report, that information should be assessed within the context of the evolution of the peace process, and expressed the hope that the consequences of that period would permanently disappear. She also agreed with the Commissioner-General that the signing of the peace agreement that year had been crucial. The European Union praised the Israeli and Palestinian leaders for their courage and vision in signing the agreement.

42. During the period covered by the report, the Palestinian people had encountered serious social and economic difficulties as a result of the prolonged closure of the Occupied Territories. That situation had tested

(Mrs. Zidmundova, Belgium)

UNRWA's ability to address the urgent needs of an ever-growing number of refugees. Unfortunately, the tragic wave of violence in the region had affected UNRWA staff working in the occupied territories. Since its creation in 1949, the agency had alleviated the plight of more than 2.5 million Palestinian refugees. She pointed out that it was also continuing its efforts to increase aid to Lebanese refugees, and to strengthen its presence in Jordan.

43. The European Union had always considered the aid provided by UNRWA as being, by definition, provisional in nature and not a substitute for a durable political solution. Accordingly, it was essential that the international community should undertake to provide substantial aid in order to bolster the courageous decisions currently being taken. Similarly, the European Union would seek to coordinate and actively promote the relief efforts of the various donors.

44. In accordance with its well known basic position, which included support for Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the European Union was determined to take an active role in the peace process which had begun in Madrid, both at the political and at the economic level and, therefore, was willing to immediately provide an aid programme of 20 million ECU (approximately 24 million US dollars), and it expected to provide a substantial amount in grants and loans to the occupied territories during the next five years.

45. In the context of its own foreign policy and collective security, the European Union planned to contribute to the peace process in the Near East by mobilizing political, economic and financial means in support of a broad peace plan.

46. It was clear that UNRWA had henceforth to make a decisive contribution, mainly within the framework of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the occupied territories, to give new impetus to the economic and social stability of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Thus, UNRWA should, as rapidly as possible, take its place within the secretariat of that Committee. The European Union had also noted with interest the proposals concerning supplementary assistance projects for the inhabitants of the occupied territories elaborated by the inter-agency task force established by the Secretary-General, and the important role UNRWA would play in the implementation of those projects.

47. The European Union was convinced that the experience and knowledge of UNRWA would be used to full advantage during the transfer of authority from the Israeli military Government and its civil administration to the Palestinians appointed by the new administration. Continued assistance to Palestinian refugees in other countries of the region should undoubtedly remain a primary concern.

48. The European Union, which hoped that in the near future UNRWA assistance would no longer be essential, was concerned that the Agency lacked a solid financial base from which it could continue to provide its services. The Union, which made the highest net contribution to the occupied territories, also made

(Mrs. Zidmundova, Belgium)

the highest contribution to the UNRWA regular budget and substantial contributions to emergency and other programmes. For the period 1993 to 1995, its contribution would amount to some 94 million ECUs (US$ 112 million). During the current year, it had provided US$ 36 million for activities in the fields of education, health and nutrition. In addition, in 1993 it had contributed US$ 26 million to development programmes and emergency assistance operations. During the current year, the total individual contributions of the States members of the European Union to the UNRWA regular budget had reached more than US$ 48.5 million. She urged other States which had contributed to UNRWA in the past to increase their support for efforts to bring peace and prosperity to the region.

49. Mr. BATU (Turkey) said that he fully shared the hope expressed by the Commissioner-General that his report covered an era which had gone forever (A/48/13, preface). He looked forward to the Agency's new role as a major contributor to the social and economic development of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The irreversible momentum already achieved had to be maintained so that complete and lasting peace and security in the region could be achieved, within the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

50. The Israeli-Palestinian agreements could bear fruit only if the Palestinians were given the chance to develop a viable economic infrastructure, which would serve not only as a foundation for the Palestinian nation but also as a means of easing political tensions in the region and further promoting the cause of regional peace and stability. In that connection, he cited paragraph 35 of document A/48/13. In that context, Turkey was prepared to offer its renewed support and contribute to the development of the Palestinian infrastructure in the fields of transportation, telecommunications, environment, housing and construction. It could also provide services and facilities in the areas of banking, finance, agriculture and tourism and was prepared to provide technical assistance and training in various fields ranging from health care to food processing. With its wide experience in resettlement activities, Turkey was also in a good position to make contributions in that field.

51. At the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Early Warning regarding New Flows of Refugees and Displaced Persons, held in Tunisia, his country had proposed that a project should be initiated for vocational training and job placement for Palestinian refugees and had pledged US$ 52 million at the donor conference held in Washington, D.C.

52. An integrated programme of assistance for the West Bank and Gaza Strip with the participation of other United Nations agencies would be meaningful only if recognition were given to the importance of the role of UNRWA and to its efforts over the past 45 years, in extremely difficult circumstances, to provide education, relief and medical services to the 2.8 million Palestinian refugees living in that region. The Agency's staff members were among the most experienced and dedicated of those serving in the field. Now that the working conditions for UNRWA seemed to have improved definitively, it was time for the

(Mr. Batu, Turkey)

various parties in the region, with the generous support of the international community, to join together in helping UNRWA to meet the new challenges of the future.

53. The primary role of UNRWA in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process should be recognized, since the Agency had been providing services to the Palestinian population in the region for decades. In accordance with the growing importance of UNRWA, its financial needs for new short-term activities should be met. The situation of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria should also be taken into account; projects for improving the standard of living of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should not be undertaken at the expense of projects for Palestinian refugees elsewhere. Lastly, multilateral activities in the region should be increased and coordination mechanisms should be established to determine the most efficient and cost-effective way for the various United Nations agencies to implement new assistance programmes.

54. In his capacity as Chairman of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, he pointed out that the Agency's financial situation was the common responsibility of all States Members of the United Nations. Each Member State should bear its fair share of that common responsibility, even if the contributions of some countries were modest. Governments that had not yet contributed to UNRWA should make an effort to do so and Governments that had already contributed should increase their share.

55. Mr. SALMI (Finland), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that he applauded the direct negotiations carried out recently between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) under the auspices of Norway, which had led to the signing on 13 September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. That Declaration was an important first step towards a lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine and had opened up unprecedented possibilities for the entire Middle East.

56. Nevertheless, the peace process was still at a delicate stage. In order to ensure that it stayed on track, forward-looking measures were needed to improve the situation of the Palestinian people and the necessary financing should be obtained rapidly. Neither time nor resources should be wasted on uncoordinated activities. The Nordic countries were pleased that the international community had pledged generously at the meeting of donor countries at Washington, D.C. on 1 October 1993; at the same time, they wished to stress that, in using such assistance, the expertise of the United Nations agencies already engaged in operational activities in the occupied territories should be fully utilized. In that connection, UNRWA should continue to play a basic role, in particular in short-term activities, given its vast experience and long-standing presence in the region.

57. With regard to the report of UNRWA, the Nordic countries noted with concern that the Agency's financial prospects for 1993 were unfavourable because the

(Mr. Salmi, Finland)

growth in the level of contributions was not keeping pace with the growth in the number of beneficiaries of UNRWA programmes and their rising costs. The lack of funding and the difficult conditions, especially in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Lebanon, were affecting the Agency's educational, health care and other programmes. Although UNRWA had continued to strive to maintain and even improve the services it provided, the rising quality of the education given in UNRWA schools in Jordan bore witness to the fact that stable conditions were essential for the proper delivery of those services. It was also encouraging to note that where conditions had permitted, income-generation programmes had expanded rapidly. The Nordic countries supported the view that UNRWA must maintain its services to Palestinian refugees in all its fields of operation, i.e. the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan.

58. As major donors to UNRWA, the Nordic countries were encouraged by the fact that new countries had joined in assisting the Palestinian refugees. In that regard, they would especially welcome increased participation by the countries of the region.

59. Despite the current promising political situation in the Middle East, continuing acts of violence remained a question of great concern. Lasting solutions to political and economic problems could be achieved only through peaceful means, i.e. negotiations, confidence-building measures and economic and social development. The Nordic countries appealed to all parties to break the vicious circle of violence and reprisals.

60. A matter of special concern was the safety of the staff of UNRWA and other international organizations. In that connection, the Nordic countries welcomed the fact that UNRWA and the Israeli authorities had arrived at a good working relationship and a spirit of understanding. It was crucial that that good relationship should continue. Despite the enormous work that lay ahead and the many obstacles that remained, there was reason to hope that the situation of the Palestinian people would improve. The Nordic countries would also hope that the Committee would do its share, through concrete action and by ensuring that the resolutions to be adopted reflected the current situation.

61. Mr. XIE Yunilang (China) said that the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13) indicated that in the wake of over 40 years of war and conflict, the Palestinian people were living under extremely difficult conditions and their situation was deteriorating. The increase in the number of refugees demonstrated that the problem of the Palestinian refugees had not been resolved. His delegation had also noted the enormous difficulties that UNRWA had encountered since 1992. Despite the harsh conditions, UNRWA had done a great deal of useful work, from which many Palestinian refugees had benefited. His delegation expressed its appreciation and admiration to the entire staff of UNRWA for their dedication and achievements.

(Mr. Xie Yunilang, China)

62. The agreement recently signed between the PLO and the Government of Israel on mutual recognition and the issue of Palestinian autonomy was merely the beginning of the settlement of the Middle East question; however, it represented a major breakthrough for resolving the situation in conformity with the fundamental interests of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. It also suggested that a final settlement of the question of Palestine and of the Middle East question as a whole could be achieved through negotiation. China wholeheartedly welcomed those developments.

63. His Government had therefore consistently advocated a political settlement of the Middle East question, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), China also believed that the occupied Arab territories should be returned and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people restored. At the same time, the sovereignty and security of all countries in the Middle East, including Israel, should be respected and guaranteed. China supported the Middle East peace process and was prepared to work with other Member States of the Organization, in particular the Middle Eastern countries, to achieve a comprehensive peace in that region at an early date. For many years, his Government had provided to the best of its ability assistance to the Palestinian people, through UNRWA and it had decided to continue its contributions to UNRWA in 1994.

64. Mrs. DUKULY-TOLBERT (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO provided assistance to the Palestinian people through a number of regular programme activities and special projects.

65. The UNRWA/UNESCO cooperation programme provided staff comprising 12 posts, P-4 through D-2 levels, to the UNRWA/UNESCO department of education, where they provided technical assistance and guidance to UNRWA's vast education programme. The education programme had a target population of 398,000 Palestinian refugees attending over 640 schools and 8 training centres in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as approximately 149,000 Palestinians residing in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. There was an elementary and preparatory education programme that followed the curricula of the host countries and covered the grades for which education was compulsory in each of those countries. There was also a two-year post-secondary vocational training programme and a two-year post-secondary technical education programme covering over 40 courses, in such subjects as auto mechanics and business practice, employing syllabuses developed by UNESCO and UNRWA staff. In addition, short-term courses in legal studies and fuel injection mechanics had been established in the occupied territories during the academic year 1992/93. The UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education in Amman, Jordan, was responsible for curriculum development and enrichment, in-service teacher training and educational research and testing. A priority area in that programme was the development and/or improvement of self-learning materials and remedial measures to compensate pupils and teachers in the occupied territories for the loss of classroom time sustained since the onset of the intifadah. The contribution of UNESCO to the

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cooperation programme also included fellowships, educational equipment and textbook review services.

66. In conformity with the resolutions and decisions of its governing bodies, UNESCO monitored the functioning of educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories. At its one hundred thirty-ninth session, the Executive Board had invited the Director-General to launch an appeal to the international community, at governmental and non-governmental level, for voluntary contributions in order to make good the deficit in the budget of the Palestinian universities caused by the protracted closure of those institutions and the current situation. At other sessions of the Executive Board and at the General Conference of UNESCO the Director-General had reported on the organization's concerns regarding educational and cultural institutions in the occupied territories.

67. On 22 January 1993, the Director-General had launched an appeal to Member States, international organizations and Arab and Islamic funding sources for voluntary contributions in order to make good the deficit in the budget of the Palestinian universities in the occupied territories. No positive responses to that appeal had been received to date.

68. In September 1992, representatives of UNESCO and of the Steering Committee of the Palestinian European Academic Cooperation in Education (PEACE) Programme had signed a cooperative agreement under which six Palestinian universities would be linked to 12 European universities as part of the UNITWIN project to benefit Palestinian universities. UNESCO had contributed $16,000 in seed money for that effort.

69. Through the Participation Programme, funds had been provided for preparatory activities for a Palestinian curriculum development centre. A workshop currently was being considered at which Palestinian educators and international experts would meet to discuss problems and strategies for the development of secondary school curricula.

70. In 1992, the United Nations Regional Office for Education in the Arab States (UNEDBAS) had signed three contracts with Al-Quds University, with the aim of preparing two studies on distance education for Palestinians and reinforcing documentation and study centres. In December 1992, UNEDBAS had conducted a seminar in Jerusalem attended by 43 representatives of non-governmental organizations, universities and United Nations organizations on the subject of enhancing the access of disadvantaged Palestinian children in the occupied territories to basic education.

71. Under its regular programme budget, UNESCO provided funds for equipment for Palestinian universities and for fellowships for Palestinian students. During the period 1992-1993, 13 fellowships had been awarded. In addition, four fellowships had been provided to date for 1992-1993 through the Participation Programme. Palestinian institutions had submitted 12 requests, for a total of $162,000, seven of which had been approved. Palestinian institutions had

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received a total of $93,000, to be utilized in the areas of culture, education and the social sciences and for four fellowships and emergency assistance to Jordan during the Gulf crisis.

72. At the one hundred twenty-ninth session of the Executive Board in 1988, UNESCO had been requested to carry out a study and analyse the needs of the Palestinian people in the organization's fields of competence, particularly in education. In March 1990, UNESCO had published the results of the study, entitled "Study on the needs of the Palestinian people in the field of education and training", covering general education, vocational and non-formal education, manpower training at the community college level and university training. In its conclusions, the study had proposed 10 major projects relating to education and training of the Palestinian people. Most elements of the projects still awaited funding.

73. Lastly, she summarized the assistance which UNESCO had provided to the Palestinian people in the field of culture and referred, inter alia, to a contribution of $16,000 for the preparation of an inventory of the Palestinian cultural heritage and a contribution of $25,000 for the translation of a study on Palestinian cultural identity. In the framework of the Participation Programme for 1994-1995, UNESCO would continue providing assistance to the Palestinian people, particularly for short-term training courses in the fields of museum management and the preservation of historical monuments and sites.

74. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should close the list of speakers in the general debate on Wednesday, 17 November 1993, at 6 p.m.

75. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/48/21; A/C.4/48/L.17)

76. Mr. SANBAR (Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Public Information) said that he had listened with interest to the statements by delegations in the Committee on Information. In the light of the questions raised in that Committee, he suggested that at its next session it should consider the initiatives and criteria adopted regarding the creation of new information centres and added that the Department of Public Information (DPI) would actively participate in the discussion of the question. As to the specific questions raised concerning the information operation at Bonn, DPI and the German Government were engaged in preliminary discussions and he would report on the matter at the next session of the Committee on Information.

77. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should consider and take decisions on the five proposals before it at the same time. If he heard no objection he would take it that the Committee agreed to follow that procedure.

78. Draft resolutions A and B and draft decisions I and II, contained in paragraphs 86 and 87 to 89 of document A/48/21, and the draft decision contained in document A/C.4/48/L.17, were adopted without a vote.

79. Mr. JERBAN (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that although the Committee had adopted the draft resolutions and decisions concerning agenda item 88 by consensus, he wished to express reservations regarding the appointment of Israel as a member of the Committee on Information, because his Government did not recognize that State.

80. Mr. ZAMANINIA (Islamic Republic of Iran) expressed reservations regarding draft decision II contained in paragraph 89 of the report of the Committee on Information because his Government did not recognize the State which was seeking to become a member of the Committee.

81. Mr. OMER (Sudan) said that he had reservations concerning paragraph 88 of the report and requested that they appear in the summary record of the meeting.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.